



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
April 1, 2010

For More Information, Contact:  
Tricia Kiefer, RN, BAN  
Division of Children's Special Health  
Services  
North Dakota Department of Health  
Phone: 701.328.2436  
E-mail: [tkiefer@nd.gov](mailto:tkiefer@nd.gov)

### **Governor Hoeven Proclaims Autism Awareness Month**

BISMARCK, N.D. – Governor John Hoeven has proclaimed April as *Autism Awareness Month* in North Dakota.

Autism, a neurological developmental disability that generally appears before the age of 3, is a spectrum of disorders characterized by impaired social interaction and communication and by restrictive and repetitive behaviors. According to a 2009 national report, one out of every 91 children has an autism spectrum disorder. Within the last decade, the autism rate in the United States has gone up nearly 150 percent.

“Chances are, if you don’t currently have a family member affected by an autism spectrum disorder, you have a friend or relative who does or will in the near future,” said Tricia Kiefer with the North Dakota Department of Health’s Division of Children’s Special Health Services. “Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the country, and more children will be diagnosed with autism this year than cancer, diabetes, Down syndrome and AIDS combined. As the parent of a child with autism, I understand the heavy burden that autism places on a family. This load needs to be lightened in any way possible.”

Some of the early signs of an autism spectrum disorder include:

- Not pointing at objects to show interest by age 14 months.
- Avoiding eye contact.
- Preference to be alone rather than with peers.
- Delayed speech and language skills.
- Repeating words or phrases over and over (echolalia).
- Being significantly affected by schedule changes.
- Obsessive interests.
- Unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel.

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600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept. 301, Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0200  
Phone: 701.328.2372 Fax: 701.328.4727 E-mail: [health@nd.gov](mailto:health@nd.gov)

Visit the health department home page at [www.ndhealth.gov](http://www.ndhealth.gov).

“It's important to remember that each person with autism is unique. Each person with autism has different needs, dreams, strengths and skills,” said Jocelyn Sloan, president of the Autism Society of North Dakota. “Equally important is that children with autism become adults with autism, some of whom will require accommodations and services well into adulthood.”

The 2009 Legislative Assembly passed and Governor Hoeven signed Senate Bill 2174, creating the North Dakota Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The task force currently is developing a state autism spectrum disorder plan that will be presented to Governor Hoeven and the Legislative Council by July 1, 2010.

For more information, contact JoAnne Hoesel, North Dakota Department of Human Services, at 701.328.8924, or Tricia Kiefer, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2436.

**PROCLAMATION  
AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH  
APRIL 2010**

**WHEREAS**, autism is a neurological disorder affecting the functioning of the brain, resulting in significant impairment of an individual's ability to learn, develop healthy interactive behaviors, and understand verbal, nonverbal and reciprocal communication; and

**WHEREAS**, autism is the third most common developmental disability, affecting 1.5 million individuals nationwide and 4,000 individuals in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, although a cure for autism has not been found, persons with autism can be helped to reach their greatest potential through accurate, early diagnosis and the resulting appropriate education and intervention; and

**WHEREAS**, autism has wide-ranging implications for the entire family of the diagnosed individual, and early diagnosis, research, training, education and therapies are important to reducing the effects of autism; and

**WHEREAS**, North Dakotans are encouraged to increase their awareness and understanding of this complex disability to ensure that individuals with autism are accurately diagnosed and effectively treated throughout their lives.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim April 2010, **AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH** in the state of North Dakota.

John Hoeven  
Governor

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